

From Dante to Fishman: Migration in Sociolinguistics and in the Language Situation of Ireland

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The evolution of linguistics has been uniquely shaped by migration: from the promotion of the vernacular in renaissance Italy by the exiled Dante to the immigrant experience of sociolinguists in the 21st century. Migration is a key theme in contemporary linguistics as the language situations of many countries, Ireland, for example, transition to multiculturalism and multilingualism. The migration experience will continue to shape the study of language and sociolinguistics in the future.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, migration, ethnicity, multilingualism, multiculturalism, Ireland

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1. Introduction: the phenomenon of migration in linguistics

The connection between migration and language comprises methodologies such as multi-sited ethnography, socio-philosophical concepts such as diaspora and displacement, identity and the nation state, and linguistic investigations of code-switching, translanguaging, language loss and maintenance. The study of the connection of migration and language has proceeded apace in the field of sociolinguistics in volumes such as *The Routledge Handbook of Migration and Language* (Canagarajah 2017) and new journals such as *Migration and Language Education* (from 2019).

What are the basic constructs of this interdisciplinary field? This paper is divided into two parts. Firstly, I discuss the evolution of linguistics, especially ‘sociolinguistics,’ from the perspective of migration. I suggest that the basic themes of sociolinguistics likely

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reflected linguists' migration experience. Secondly, I record how migration affects the language situation of one country—Ireland: the decline of Irish (emigration) versus the rise of multilingualism (in-migration).

2. Sociolinguistics is 'migration linguistics'

In this first part, I suggest that, in fact, the core themes of sociolinguistics likely derive from the 'migration experience' of linguists. These themes—language contact, language shift and change, language norms and standardization, multilingualism and bilingualism, language maintenance and loss, pidgins and creoles—derive from researchers' own 'migration experience.' Typical of these complex connections, in his seminal paper, 'Language and Immigration' in the appropriately named journal *Norwegian American Studies* Norwegian immigrant Einar Haugen introduced one of the earliest expositions in sociolinguistics of migration and language, "The immigrant cannot be expected to throw away his language like last year's hat. From his first day in the new land a tug of war between the old self and the new self is going on inside the immigrant. The struggle is evident in his successive linguistic adaptations. The immigrant bears the mark of language conflict" (Haugen 1938: 52).

I will show examples from the initiators of sociolinguistics in the 20th century. But let me begin with the early European renaissance, to the poet Dante. At this time, the issues of nation and language were just starting. Renaissance states were starting to construct what Irish historian and immigrant, Benedict Anderson, called "the birth of imagined communities" (Anderson 1983).

Dante. The poet Durante di Alighiero degli Alighieri or simply 'Dante' wrote an extraordinary work on language, *De Vulgari Eloquentia* 1302 (On Speaking in the Vernacular). This linguistic treatise is the first serious study of the multilingual situation in Europe (Maher 2017). In this work, Dante discusses the relation between high status Latin and vernacular Tuscan dialects (diglossia). He discusses how this situation arose (the politics of language) and how Tuscan (Fiorentina) dialects can be selected as normative forms (language standardization and planning). However, Dante only composed his reflections as an exile. His discovery of the Tuscan standard arose only as a result of his actual experience, as a migrant, of the alternative dialects of power, 'Occitan' and 'Sicilian.' Dante was rejected by Firenze and made a permanent exile. He never returned. The semiotician and novelist, Umberto Eco writes in *On Literature* (Eco 2002) (see also *The Search for the Perfect Language*, Eco 1989), "Dante was searching for a vernacular Italian language and, thanks to his contacts as an itinerant exile, he experienced both the variety of Italian dialects and the variety of European languages." Dante's themes were:

- language status
- the legitimacy of Latin, Occitan, Sicilian, Italian
- standard vs vernacular / multilingualism / language attitudes and beliefs

Dante also called for ‘language tolerance.’ He noted in his philosophical work *Convivio* (1304–1307) that people have discriminatory views of language, dialect prejudice. As a migrant on the island of Sicily, he finds his own speech was very different. A different language. In this new language contact situation he experiences ‘dialect complex,’: *shame and lowness of the wicked men of Italy, that praise somebody else’s vernacular and despise their own...* (*Convivio*, I, XI). In his writings, we see Dante’s unique concept, ‘convivio.’ It is, in fact, a philosophical concept as well a linguistic concept. Conviviality is an operative concept in current sociolinguistic discussion. It has been. It calls for a cosmopolitan and multicultural mind. In our lexicon it translates as ‘co-existence’ and in the current multicultural notion, ‘conviviality;’ in Japanese *tabunka kyosei*. It seems that Dante has returned.

3. The evolution of sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics’ original concerns are, in fact, migration themes. The living experience of 20th century migration and migrant scholars. Let us look at the evolution of sociolinguistics in the 20th century: migrants, exiles and sojourners and sociolinguists. The immigrant experience encounters languages as interesting, frustrating. The immigrant experience tries to understand two massive phenomena: language contact and identity.

One of the founders of the discipline of the study of language and society is, William Labov (variationist sociolinguistics) whose familial links were Ukrainian. In the 20th century, the new agenda and themes of the field of sociolinguistics incorporated the immigrant/sojourner perspectives of figures in the lives of, Edward Sapir, Marcel Cohen, Max Weinreich, Roman Jakobson, Heinz Kloss, Einar Ingvald Haugen, Charles Ferguson, John Gumperz, Basil Bernstein, Michael A. K. Halliday, Uriel Weinreich, Joshua Fishman, Susan Ervin-Tripp, William Labov, Christina Bratt, Jiří V. Neustupný. Let me review the backgrounds of some of the key figures in sociolinguistics—scholars born before the 2nd World War—in chronological order.

- Edward Sapir, 1884–1939 (language ethnology and sociolinguistic relativity)
Pomerania, Liverpool, Connecticut
- Marcel Cohen, 1884–1974 (language contact Arabic-Hebrew, language communities)
Algeria and France

- Max Weinreich, 1894–1969 Yiddish, language maintenance, language contact
Lithuania, Russia, New York
- Roman Jakobson 1896–1982, Stylistics, the literary avant-garde, cultural semiotics,
Moscow-Praha-Massachusetts
- Heinz Kloss 1904–1987, linguistic minorities, language planning, *abstand*, *ausbau*
Saxony-Anhalt and Toronto
- Einar Ingvald Haugen, 1906–1994, language ‘ecology’ language and identity,
dialectology
Oppdai Norway, Wisconsin
- John Gumperz (Hans-Josef Gumperz) 1922–2013, discourse analysis
Germany, Berkley USA
- Basil Bernstein, 1924–2000, sociology of language
London, Lithuanian background
- Michael A. K. Halliday, 1925–2018, functional linguistics, social semiotics of
language
Leeds, Edinburgh, Melbourne
- Uriel Weinreich, 1926–1967, Yiddish, dialectology
Poland (Wilno), New York
- Joshua Fishman, 1926–2015, sociology of language, Yiddish, language
endangerment
Canada, New York, Lithuanian background
- Christina Bratt Paultson, 1932–2016, language maintenance, bilingualism
Uppsala Sweden, Pittsburgh
- Jiří V. Neustupný, 1933–2017, language planning/management, intercultural
communication
Praha, Osaka, Melbourne
- William Labov 1927–, macro-sociolinguistics, variationist sociolinguistics
Pennsylvania, Ukrainian background

The history of linguistics highlights the Jewish contribution to the sociology of language. The Israeli scholar of endangered languages, Ghil’ad Zuckermann, noticed this: “the exploration of Jewish Languages shaped sociolinguistics. Throughout history Jews have been multilingual immigrants. The immigrant experience resulted in Jewish languages embodying intricate and fascinating mechanisms of language contact and identity” (Zuckermann 2003). I queried the connection between sociolinguistics and migration with the sociolinguist William Labov. I asked, do you think ‘the migration experience’ is relevant to the evolution of linguistics, especially modern sociolinguistics? He replied, “yes,” the connection is very clear noting his study of Italian and Jewish

immigrant background speech in New York... (William Labov, p.c. 2018). A possible difference—if ‘difference is an appropriate term here’—between the immigrant backgrounds of linguists and those of sociolinguists would provide an interesting comparison but this lies beyond the scope of the current paper.

Migration, sojourn, exile provide real data (Maher 2017). The experience informed Dante. The experience informed linguists from Max Weinreich to William Labov. When we move/remove from one place to another place we reflect on what happens to language: living data for the study of language. In this first part I have shown that migration is a key theme in sociolinguistics. It is a factor in language use and language management and policy. It underpinned sociolinguistics of the early 20th century.

4. Migration: key to the language situation of Ireland

In this second part I give an example of the language and migration situation in one country. Ireland is a small island in the Atlantic, with a population of less than 5 million, with a massive cultural impact in the world of scholarship, religion, literature, music and political history. Irish culture became world culture largely as a result of Irish emigration. What were the language implications? I will point to two phenomena: decline of the Irish language (emigration) vs rise of multilingualism (in-migration). The opposite social forces of emigration and in-migration (Giddens 1994) are complex and connected.

Irish Emigration. For 300 years, Irish speakers emigrated to Europe, North and South America. Poverty, starvation and land seizure assaulted Irish-speaking communities—with mechanisms of language prohibition. From Anglo-Norman control, Cromwell’s bloody conquest and centuries of violent British occupation, the language situation of Ireland was repeatedly shaped by colonialism. Irish language prohibition by colonial occupiers continued for hundreds of years. The Statutes of Kilkenny (1366) commanded that, “if any English, or Irish living among the English, use the Irish language amongst themselves, contrary to this ordinance...his lands and tenements shall be seized. Henry VIII (1536) to the colonial rulers of the port city of Galway ordered, “every inhabitant within said town endeavor themselves to speak English” (Crowley 1991: 2). The Great Famine of the 1840s accelerated migration and devastated further the Irish language. Emigration continued in the 20th century.

Each family has its own stories. Let me tell you my story told by my mother when I was younger. One section of my family emigrated from County Mayo to Yorkshire, England. The other section of the family emigrated to New York, America. They now run a dry cleaners in New York. However, not every family member succeeded. My uncle boarded a ship, built in Ireland, in 1912, sailing to New York. It was a big, expensive ship: a ‘migrant ship.’ My uncle travelled 3rd class. Like my mother, he was an Irish

speaker. The ship contained 710 immigrants mostly Irish, Italian and Scandinavian. Most Irish-speaking passengers were from my grandparents district in County Mayo. The ship was called ‘The Titanic.’ The ship sank—with my uncle on board. In some Irish-speaking villages of County Mayo, like Addergoole, 10% of the village population drowned on the Titanic.

Ireland before: homogeneous society. Irish society in the 1950s was still homogeneous. A population with a similar background, English and Irish-speaking, a low level of education, little experience of life outside Ireland and poor economic performance resulting in continued emigration. For more than a century, a high proportion of the young population had emigrated, never to return. Ireland suffered from an outflow of talent affecting many areas of business and the public service. Population decline not only in traditionally rural areas, many of them Irish-speaking, continued also in the economically sluggish urban centres.

5. Ireland after: multicultural/multilingual society

Ireland has changed from a culturally homogeneous, mainly English-speaking society—to a multilingual and multicultural society. Migration affects all social classes (see results on ethnicity, social status in *Irish National Census* 2016). The Prime Minister of Ireland is a young second generation migrant, a ‘double,’ 38 years old. “I have an Indian father, Irish mother. I’m not a half-Indian politician, or a doctor politician or a gay politician for that matter” (*Irish Times*, 2015, June 5).

The language situation in Ireland in the late 20th century changed dramatically. When the economy turned around in the 1960s, investment in education increased. Emigration declined and some returnee migrants of the 1950s brought back new skills and experience. According to the 2016 National Census of Ireland: 1 in 8 persons is non-national, 8 people who travel on a bus every day speak a language other than English or Irish at home on a daily basis, 612,018 people in Ireland (13% of the overall population) are multilingual, i.e., speak a foreign language on a daily basis (up 19% from 514,068 in 2011). This is a rise of nearly 100,000 people since 2011.

The top languages spoken were Polish (113,225), Lithuanian (30,502), Romanian (26,645) and Portuguese (16,737) followed by Spanish, Chinese and Arabic. Foreign nationals living in Ireland are also younger on average than the Irish population, with nearly half of all non-Irish aged between 25 and 42. The average age of non-Irish nationals rose from 32.6 years in 2011 to 34.8 years in 2016, while the average age for Irish nationals increased by just one year to 37.7 years.

The number of people in Ireland who hold dual Irish nationality has increased by nearly 90% over the last five years. This raises an interesting (research) question. Does

possessing dual nationality assist an immigrant's cultural and language maintenance? If I am a Turkish immigrant in Dublin and I am permitted to have Irish nationality and also retain my parent's Turkish nationality does that dual identity assist bilingualism? Can it facilitate self-esteem? Facilitate transition to Irish culture? Turkish language maintenance? Bilingual and bicultural esteem? The link between nationality law and language maintenance is a question for further research.

The Irish Language. New speakers, different locations. In 21st century Ireland, inward-migration has significantly affected the condition of Ireland's official language *an Gaeilge* as well as sister Celtic languages in Scotland and the Isle of Man. Irish is the first official language of Ireland, a (often unpopular) compulsory subject in school education, employed daily in various *Gaeltachtaí* (Irish-speaking communities). Numerically, Irish is still a minority language and a 2nd language of the population. It has constitutional status as the national and first official language. It is an official language of the EU. Statistics indicate, however, that more young urban people are learning Irish in some cases this language is becoming a tourist product (Maher 2017). Also, crucially, migrants are learning Irish. Here is a short Irish film about a migrant worker. It is satirical and humorous. The film is much loved among Irish language schoolteachers in Ireland. Why? Schoolteachers point out, "Look! Immigrants are learning Irish. You can too!" The film *Yu Ming is Ainm Dom* 'Yu Ming is My Name' (Daniel O'Hara 2003) shows a young man who decides to emigrate to Ireland, to work. He arrives in Ireland but is shocked to find that people in Dublin speak English not Irish. As you watch it please consider four themes: (1) The historic decline of Irish, (2) The arrival of immigrants to Ireland, (3) Migrants moving to attractive rural areas, (4) Migrants learning Irish and speaking Irish.

We note two social movements here: (1) The decline of the Irish language, over 200 years, (2) the Irish language learning is becoming more diverse. That is, Irish is moving in its own direction. The Irish language in terms of new speakers and new learners is increasing. The number of Irish-medium school in urban areas (Dublin, Cork, Galway) is actually increasing.

The Irish government's Gaeltacht Act 2012 gives statutory effect to the implementation of *the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030*. In this language planning document (Ó Riagáin 2018) it is stated that, "under the new Act, a language planning process will be instigated whereby a language plan will be prepared at community level for each Gaeltacht district" (Irish Government 2009). Under this act, Gaeltacht areas will be redesignated as 'Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas' with language plans agreed with the communities in each area.

In previous studies I have argued that Irish has become more urban and urbane, more 'cool' (Maher 2005, 2010 see also Pennycook and Otsuji 2015) and spoken by speakers of various (migrant) backgrounds. Recent research indicates that Irish speakers in urban

areas (Dublin, Cork, Galway, etc.) are actually increasing (O’Riagain 2018). However, urban speakers of Irish find it difficult to understand Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht due to urban simplifications of the phonetic and grammatical structure of Irish.

Please note that emigration contributed to the presence of Celtic language speaking communities around the world: East Coast USA: 18,815 speak Irish at home (USA Census 2005). Scots Gaelic in Nova Scotia: 1,275 (Canada Census 2011). Welsh. 5,000–12,000 people speak Patagonian Welsh as a first language, 25,000 speaking it as second language (Argentina Census 2012).

The causes of a modest revitalization of Irish (and other Celtic languages) in some social areas are linked to: belief in autonomy and self-determination (symbolic national identity of Scots Gaelic in Scotland), immigration to rural areas where immigrants are interested in Irish as a mark of a new identity (Ireland), Tourism (i.e., language tourism). Consider an example from the dimension of place-names in the linguistic landscape. In Scotland English place-names are being rapidly translated into Scots Gaelic—even when the location was not named in Scots Gaelic. The surprising insertion of Scots Gaelic into the urban and rural landscape is a legitimization of Scots Gaelic, a ‘conversion’ from an English-only dominated landscape to a bilingual landscape that reflects the autochthonous (indigenous, historic) language situation of Scotland. The new bilingual landscape (English and Scots Gaelic) expresses aspirational translation looking towards toward a politically independent Scotland.

In Ireland, new Irish identities are loose and flexible. Dual nationality in Ireland is not merely permitted but encouraged by the Irish government. Irish language learning—in bilingual communities or as a second language learned in school—is a symbol of a newly acquired identity.

The Town of Ballyhaunis: migration, population increase, multiculturalism. We may refer to just one town in Ireland, in County Mayo. This is the town where the author’s grandparents came from. The county is located on the west coast of Ireland with a population of 130,638 (Census 2016) and the town is Ballyhaunis.

The social phenomenon in this rural town is population increase—not decrease. Population increase is happening in both some Gaeltacht and English-speaking villages. For example, in Mayo, the Gaeltacht has a total population of 10,886 (Census 2011) and represents 10.8% of the total Gaeltacht population; County Mayo saw a population growth of 5.5% in the period 2006–2011. Over 30% of the population is under 25-years-old.

6. Ethnicity and nationality

When the author's own grandparents left the village of Ballyhaunis for England and work, that village in the west of Ireland was white, homogeneous and all Irish. In 2019, non-Irish nationals accounted for 41.5% of the population of this area compared with a national average figure of 12.0%. Polish (175 persons) were the largest group, followed by Pakistani people (136 persons). Regarding the Irish language 608 persons could speak Irish and of these 205 spoke the language daily. 1,028 persons spoke a language other than Irish or English at home and of these 337 could not speak English well or at all. Urdu was the most common foreign language spoken at home with 223 speakers. Public services in town hall, NGO bodies as well as by local church groups are active. How this emergent situation has influenced language and cultural awareness, as well as the issue of linguistic rights is yet to be studied in local situations such as Ballyhaunis.

To summarize, white Irish people make up 40% of the population. There are two Catholic churches in the town, and it is the home to Ireland's first mosque outside Dublin. The majority of local children speak neither English nor Irish at home. Two thirds of the children in the local primary school do not speak English as their native language.

7. Conclusion

In this brief paper, I suggested that the evolution of linguistics, in particular sociolinguistics, has been, in fact, shaped by migration. I suggested that the thrust of 20th century sociolinguistics itself and, *pars pro toto*, is located in the immigrant experience of sociolinguists themselves. I showed, through one example, how migration has affected the language situation of one particular country in Europe, Ireland. As Ireland becomes a markedly immigrant society, even in rural areas, the transition towards multiculturalism and multilingualism becomes evident. However, this involves a deeper paradigm shift likely involving all the languages of Ireland including Irish—not merely the new immigrant languages. Migration and the migration experience will continue to shape the study of language and sociolinguistics in the future.

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